



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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FUTURE OF CFA RESTS WITH UPPER HOUSE

By Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Well, it has been another tense and busy month for the emergency sector and, particularly for CFA, given the implications of the Victorian Government's proposed restructure of the fire services. The Upper House Select Committee continued with the Inquiry into this legislation with many volunteers, VFBV delegates and other key players providing evidence and submissions to the Inquiry.

I would like to thank all of you who took the time to make submissions to the Inquiry and those that attended Inquiry Hearings. We all know the Inquiry timeframe was worryingly short and, as a result, many key witnesses, both volunteers and others who could have provided significant insights, were not afforded the opportunity to present to the Inquiry Committee.

Nonetheless the Inquiry did get to hear some very strong messages from volunteers and the number of submissions to the Inquiry was so large, the Committee has still not finished working through them all and is yet to publish hundreds of submissions to the Committee website.

There has been a lot of concern from volunteers about the slow publication of their submissions despite many other submissions being published many weeks ago. I have been assured that this is simply due to a workload chal-

lenge within the Committee and there has not been a selective delay on the publishing of any submissions. There have already been hundreds of volunteer submissions published to the website and I understand there is at least this many again yet to be published.

The vast majority of volunteers have expressed consistent and very strong messages of concern regarding the proposed legislation, particularly around the lack of transparency; the lack of consultation; the flawed EBA driven motivation driving the proposed change; the lack of certainty and detail; the lack of proper impact and cost analysis; the impacts on CFA culture, capability and volunteer capacity; the stripping out of all key CFA middle support/management operational staff and erosion of CFA Chief Officer's autonomy and authority; future impacts on the Fire Services Levy; the flow on effect as many more CFA volunteer brigade areas beyond the first round of 35 integrated brigades are excised out of CFA; and the fundamentally flawed destruction of a world renowned CFA integrated service model just because of an over reaching EBA agenda.

VFBV's position is that the legislation should be rejected. Further VFBV position is that the legislation is so fundamentally flawed, merely making amendments cannot fix the



problems inherent in the legislation. It will be concerning if superficial amendments get spun as supposedly fixing the fundamentally flawed legislation.

The discussion of this proposed legislation has been very frustrating for many people and there have been some disappointing criticisms thrown about in attempts to justify the reforms. There has been unfortunate misrepresentation of the facts around lack of consultation with volunteers. The UFU and some Government MPs have focused on criticising CFA volunteer brigade response times and response capacity and are using this as one of their key pushes for the proposed changes.

Alarming the Emergency Services Commissioner, without any substantiation, has claimed to the Committee that Victoria's fire services are the worst in Australia, despite singing our praises only a year or so ago and despite having a direct role and legislated responsibility along with the agencies to ensure they are operating well. And the Government has been quite clear that the change is strongly motivated by their desire to find a way to push ahead with their over-reaching EBA deal with the UFU.

Others are using the flawed line that because people are sick of reviews this is a reason to just accept this proposed restructure and hope for the best despite their apprehension.

Many people, including VFBV, have confirmed that they are willing to be involved in and help drive change where it is needed but proper change, driven by proper analysis, driven without political or industrial agendas and done in an open, collaborative and transparent way that brings people along on the journey. But be clear, these people and VFBV are also saying that the changes that need to be made do not require legislation, nor restructure of the fire services, nor dismantling of the CFA model.

The proposed legislation is



INVITATION TO APPLY: Board Members of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV)

INVITATION TO APPLY

VFBV Board vacancies for a 2 year term until 1 October 2019

Due to some confusion about the number of positions being sought and gaps in communication in some areas, the closing date for applications for the FOUR VFBV Board vacancies arising this year, has been extended until 21 August 2017.

To be clear there are FOUR positions to be filled, and two of the outgoing VFBV Board members are retiring from the Board and will not be seeking further appointment.

Applications must be lodged with VFBV by Monday 21 August 2017.

VFBV advances the interests of all Victorian fire brigade volunteers and advocates on their behalf to CFA and other key stakeholders. The VFBV Board drives policy development based on volunteer input and is involved in management of issues of central importance to all CFA volunteers.

Vacancies for Four Board Members will arise when the terms of Mick Nunweek, Jill Parker, Samantha Rothman and Hans van Hamond expire on 1 October 2017.

The term of appointment will be for two years and applications are invited from interested volunteers to be considered for these vacancies.

The role of a VFBV Board Member involves contributing to VFBV direction, policy determination and monitoring the performance and governance of the Association. Also actively contributing to policy discussion at Board Meetings, networking with others about policies and issues management, and not only making decisions but being prepared to actively advocate for the benefit of all CFA volunteers and ultimately the Victorian community.

A Board Member Role Statement including the key selection criteria is available from the VFBV office or website www.vfbv.com.au/index.php/about/vfbv/vfbvboard

This is an honorary position; no honorarium is paid.

If you are motivated by the prospect of making a difference for CFA volunteers, then send your written application addressing the key selection criteria in the role statement, plus an outline of your CFA activity including the names of two referees.

Applications must be lodged with VFBV by Monday 21 August 2017

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not the answer to addressing cultural improvements required in the fire services. And sadly the UFU Supreme Court action is now going to mean the important Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission report on their review into the fire services will be suppressed until after the Victorian Parliament considers the fire service legislation next week.

There is nothing in the proposed legislation and restructure that adds additional flexibility to what exists today in CFA to fix service gaps. There is nothing in the proposed legislation or proposed fire services restructure that adds additional resource capability or additional flexibility to what already exists in CFA today to fix service gaps, or address changing service demands.

There is nothing in the proposed legislation that provides any solution to the industrial challenges confronting CFA and MFB operational and resource decision making.

There is nothing in the proposed legislation or fire services restructure that provides anything additional to what exists today in terms of driving or enabling interoperability across the fire services and emergency sector – in fact the proposed changes further fragment the fire services.

And there has been a sad lack of focus throughout the discussions by those seeking to drive the reform on solutions that will prevent fires and mitigate risks. What the

fire services should be focusing on is building community capacity and willingness to share responsibility for their own safety; actively drive incident reduction; empower local service capacity; or as the Victorian Auditor General's report stated that the fire services need to shift our collective focus to achieving and measuring community safety outcomes rather than being preoccupied with just a narrow fire truck response time focus.

There is plenty of improvement that would be good to pursue, and a structured pursuit of improvement is very different from just 'another review'. But I repeat, the proposed legislation is not the solution and the proposed legislation is not required – instead let's set it aside, reset the clock and focus our energy on working together calmly, collaboratively and in the best interests of the whole Victorian community.

As Jack Rush QC reminded the Committee, "the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission heard from three leading world experts on organisational change and structure of

emergency services: Professor Leonard from Harvard University, Professor T'Hart from ANU and Major General Molan, formerly Chief of allied operations in Iraq.

All three warned of the dangers of radical change to organisations. An analogy was given on corporate takeover. Over half of them fail in terms of value creation and many end up exacerbating rather than erasing tribal entities.

Incremental change they said, often produces far better results than radical change. Molan's evidence was that radical change more often failed."

Jack Rush advised the committee, based on his extensive analysis and work associated with the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission that splitting up the CFA "will reduce effectiveness, it will create inefficiency and in the end it will impact on emergency response."

He advised the Committee that dismembering the CFA to achieve some sort of industrial outcome cannot be and should not be dressed up as being in the interests of emergency services or proper a firefighting outcome.

We go into the next month, wondering about the decision to be handed down by the Select Committee and more importantly the vote of MPs in the Upper House. They will decide the fate of CFA and this decision will impact on Victoria for decades to come.

Please stay active, both in terms of your engagement with this unpleasant debate and in your work as volunteers. No doubt we are all tired of this but being tired should never be a reason to roll over to something that is patently wrong.

Thank you for your active support to date. Keep it up and please keep your voices very active within volunteer networks and to your local community, MPs and anyone else who can help us influence the right out-come for our communities and the Victorian public.

VFBV SUPPORT OFFICER (WEST)



VFBV is seeking to appoint a VFBV Support Officer to work in regional Victoria with VFBV District Councils, Brigades and volunteers to facilitate consultation, issues resolution and volunteer engagement. The position is a State role, with emphasis and focus on providing support throughout CFA's West Region (Districts 15, 16 and 17). This is an existing position, with the incumbent leaving the role.

In addition to relevant skills, candidates will need to understand CFA and volunteerism, be good listeners, and be able to navigate through complex issues resolution, be self-starters and have a passion to improve arrangements that benefit the welfare and efficiency of CFA volunteers.

Extensive regional Victorian work travel is envisaged and flexible work base locations will be considered for this position, with the priority focus in the West region covering CFA Districts 15, 16 and 17. Applicants living outside the west, but within a reasonable distance (neighbouring districts) will also be considered.

Flexible working arrangements, to cater for extensive evening and weekend work, will be tailored to match the needs of our volunteer membership base.

This is a full time position giving the right candidate an opportunity to really put their stamp on the VFBV of the future.

All applications must include both a current resume and a cover letter addressing the key selection criteria outlined in the position description.

A copy of the Position Description can be found on our website www.vfbv.com.au

Any questions or queries re the application process should be directed to Cathie Smith at the VFBV Office on (03) 9886 1141 or via email at c.smith@vfbv.com.au.

Applications close on 4 September

2017 survey: register now

This years 2017 VFBV Volunteer Welfare & Efficiency Survey will open in early September. CFA volunteers can pre-register online now at www.vfbv.com.au/cfa or visit the VFBV website to find the link. All pre-registered volunteers will get emailed a link as soon as the survey is launched.

The VFBV Volunteer Welfare & Efficiency Survey is an annual snapshot of volunteer opinion, which includes 33 questions on issues chosen by volunteers. Last year a record number of CFA volunteers completed the survey and over 7,000 volunteers nationally took part through our interstate surveys. Your comments are confidential, but the results go straight to the decision makers. There's more information at our website or talk to your VFBV State Councillor for more information.